

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHJB #0253 1361504
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 151504Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0948
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS BUJUMBURA 000253

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [BY](#)
SUBJECT: WISE MAN'S COUNCIL SAYS DON'T MISS GOLDEN
OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE

REF: BUJUMBURA 246

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a May 9 meeting with Ambassador Moller, executive members of the Bashingatahe, Burundi's traditional wise men, advised that:
-- the Government of Burundi (GOB) is positioned to take advantage of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL's (FNL) intent to return to the negotiating table to conclude a final, lasting peace;
-- elections in 2010 will be successful if a peace agreement is concluded with the FNL; and
-- a transparent election commission must be put in place to assure free and fair 2010 elections.

This meeting is one in a series of discussions with political leaders and influential groups addressing the tensions exacerbated by the recent FNL armed attacks and the stalemate in the National Assembly that has effectively blocked legislative progress. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Representatives of the Bashingatahe insisted that the impending return of the FNL to peace negotiations presents a particularly advantageous opportunity for the GOB to finalize a peace agreement. (reftel) Failure to do so at this point could lead to continued violence up to and including the 2010 elections. In order to successfully negotiate with the FNL, the Bashingatahe representatives recommended that President Nkurunziza become personally involved in negotiations, and that the international community vigorously support such efforts. Further, the representatives stated the Burundian public needs to take ownership of the problem with the FNL and encourage Burundi's leaders to resolve the current dispute between the government and the rebels. In order to fully involve Burundians in the process, representatives suggested enlarging the purview and membership of the Joint Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JVMM), the organization charged with negotiating the 2006 cease-fire agreement between the FNL and GOB, to include more members from civil society.

¶3. (SBU) Bashingatahe representatives counseled that while the 2010 election campaign is already underway, peace with the FNL is essential to assuring that 2010 elections are free and fair. In addition to concluding a peace agreement with the rebels, the GOB must establish a transparent, neutral and independent electoral commission that can responsibly ensure a transparent electoral process. Voter education and preparation is another important requirement for guaranteeing a free and democratic election, as the principles of democracy and political campaigning are new to many Burundian citizens. The Bashingatahe representatives suggested using its network of 100,000 members to drive a voter education and preparation campaign, as it is a neutral, bi-ethnic, and bi-gender group that is especially well respected in rural

areas.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: While the Bashingatahe earnestly advocated expanding the JVMM to include broader civil society representation, Post judges such a move to be ill-advised. The JVMM is a technical committee as opposed to the aptly-named Political Directorate that deals with policy direction and the "healing" aspect that interests the wise men. Adding civil society representatives to this technical committee would likely make it unwieldy and transfer focus from the practical details that the JVMM manages.

¶5. (SBU) That said, Post fully endorses the Bashingatahe statement that the international community must suggest vigorous, early pre-election preparations to make free, fair and transparent elections in 2010 more likely. Without such preparations and democratic elections, Burundi's nascent democracy could face a very uncertain future. END COMMENT.
MOLLER